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ABSTRACT

This paper explores one approach to principal evaluation based on the interaction of principals with the social system of schools. The paper examines some dynamics that shape a social-context/student-achievement connection and their application to principal evaluation. The first part provides a brief background on current principal-evaluation systems and the sparse basic research on principal evaluation. The second part reviews a few principles drawn from scholarship on the social and organizational influence of formal leaders. The implications of this literature for an evaluation framework based on leader-school interaction form the third part, which discusses the importance of effective work relationships, principals' skill in performing organizational analysis, the power of the interaction view of schools, and its applicability to the improvement of principal evaluation. This framework affirms principals' call for a best professional practice standard. Whatever the motives, morals, or beliefs of educators, the standard to which they adhere is grounded in outcomes that are assessed in context. The paper refers to Schon's (1983) context-grounded, interactive view of principal assessment that uses context-imbedded criteria. (Contains 50 references.) (LMI)

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EVALUATING PRINCIPALS IN LIGHT OF CONTEXT AND SOCIALIZATION

Paper presented at the annual meeting of
the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, 1994

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EVALUATING PRINCIPALS IN LIGHT OF CONTEXT AND SOCIALIZATION

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While principals fill a pivotal role in schools, and and they often evaluate teachers, principal evaluation remains a poorly delinneated process in schools. Principal evaluation remains an underdeveloped aspect of education research and development (Duke & Stiggins, 1985). While some argue that the complexity of schools makes it unrealistic to evaluate principals on learning outcomes, the need increases for models that tie evaluation more closely with valued school performance. With expanding diversity of structure and goals among public schools, growing popularity of site-based decision-making councils and parent participation in governance, and mounting demands for accountability for outcomes rather than procedural compliance from schools, these needs can only grow.

Models that tie principal evaluation to accountability for outcomes deserve exploration, even as we acknowledge the conceptual and methodological problems attendant to principal evaluation (Heck & Marcoulides, 1992). This paper explores one approach based on the interaction of principals with the social system of schools that capitalizes on context rather than viewing it as a limitation. It relies on organizational socialization and leader/follower interaction theories and explores factors that link principals' actions to the positive outcomes they seek in schools. These factors then can be incorporated into principal evaluation practices and "tap into the organizational reality of the school to measure some of the important indicators that are related to school performance" (Heck & Marcoulides, 1992, p. 139).

Social interaction theories offer insights missing from the mainstream of existing principal evaluation practice. They guard against evaluation schemes that "overattend to variables that are not as important in facilitating strong educational outcomes" and recognize "the importance of the school's social context in determining student achievement" (Heck, Larsen & Marcoulides, 1990, p. 122).

In this paper, I examine some dynamics shaping a social context/student achievement connection and their application to principal evaluation. First, I provide a brief background on current principal evaluation systems and the sparse basic research on principal evaluation. Second, I review a few principles drawn from scholarship on the social and organizational influence of formal leaders (e.g., principals). The implications of this

literature for an evaluation framework based on leader/school interaction form the third and most extensive portion of the paper in which I discuss the importance of effective work relationships, principals' skill in performing organizational analysis, the power of the interaction view of schools, and the search for and assessment of desired outcomes. I conclude with the implications of this research for a best professional practice standard and its applicability to the improvement of principal evaluation.

Background

While teacher evaluation receives tremendous emphasis in the professional and popular literature, principal evaluation languishes. Glasman and Heck (1987), Duke and Stiggins (1985), and others point out that this omission leaves education with a single dimension system -- only one group of professionals is held accountable.

> The leadership role of the school principal has changed dramatically in the past 20 years. One major by-product of these changes has been the intensification of demands to improve principal assessment methods and instruments for increased school effectiveness. (Glasman & Heck, 1992, p.6)

The teacher evaluation literature, too, shies away from outcome accountability, focusing instead on the observation of behaviors, primarily because teachers and scholars assert that teaching and learning are too complex to hold any single professional accountable for outcomes. This does not mean that principals and their superiors never talk about "outcome-based principal evaluation" (Valentine, 1987), nor that behavioral objectives (Valentine, 1986), principal characteristics (Manatt, 1989), and long lists of competencies and standards of performance (Erickson, 1988) do not appear in principal evaluation systems.

These lists, characteristics, behavioral objects, and competencies in the principal evaluation literature tend to be descriptive and perceptually based. Seldom do articles about principal evaluation appear in scholarly research journals, and seldom do they adhere to accepted standards of rigor for personnel evaluation research applied to a carefully collected data base (Ginsberg & Berry, 1990). They often rely on perceptual data collected from teachers, district administrators, and parents who have little interaction with principals (Garrett & Flanigan, 1991). Some scholars see this trend promoting a "fudge factor" (Ginsberg & Berry, 1989) that allows power and influence to affect the outcome of evaluation more strongly than do criteria related to schools' performance or outcomes. Harrison and Peterson (1986) found that this situation results in principal evaluation systems that break down even when they are statewide and carefully monitored. Inconsistencies develop because of the differences between the nature of principals' work and the nature of the evaluation decoupled from context.

This inconsistency results in conflict and ambiguity. Much of the ambiguity and conflict vest in the debate about student outcome measures. As professionals debate the merits of outcome accountability for educators, society remains undecided on appropriate measures that define student achievement. Conflicts develop in perceptions as well as the operationalization of evaluation systems. For example, Harrison (1988) found that superintendents, teachers, and others cannot agree on the clarity and positive effects of principal evaluation; their perceptions of actual evaluation events differ; and principals continue to believe that superintendents rely most heavily on external measures of performance while reporting that they rely on internal measures. The importance of appropriate action-in-context for assessing principals' performance remains obscure in this descriptive literature.

Research reveals ways in which linkages can be explored among student learning, teacher behaviors, and principal actions in context, however. Researchers report promising empirical linkages among principal behaviors and school outcomes (Snyder & Ebmeier, 1992). Among the frameworks applicable to this inquiry, leader organizational socialization holds promise. This theoretical perspective, viewed as interaction between the formal leader and the social system, highlights factors that principals' superiors can use to structure more outcome-oriented evaluation systems.

The Social and Organizational Influence of Principals

The traditional search for principal effects on schools has failed to shed much light on <u>how</u> principals affect teachers' and students' actions and, subsequently, school outcomes. One promising approach for advancing this research can be found in theories of social interaction that lead to heightened social influence by formal leaders -- social validation or endorsement of authority and cultural leadership. Blau (1964) asserted that healthy interactions between leaders and followers creates group pressures that strengthen the leader's power of control and legitimate or endorse her authority. Schein (1985) argued that perceptive, sophisticated social analysis by leaders can promote the use of an organizational culture to identify, pursue, and achieve valued goals. This social influence may be the most important function of leadership. Both scholars focus their attention on the interaction of the leader with the group around issues of importance to the social whole and on leadership as a form of endorsed social influence (Dornbush & Scott, 1975; Scott, 1987).

In the discussion that follows, I examine principals' social influence in interaction with schools, its potential impacts on teachers' and students' beliefs, perceptions, descriptions of their educational lives and actions, and pivotal considerations for the practice of educational administration. Policy makers should attend to these issues when designing training and

assessment systems for principals, and principals should attend to them when working to influence teacher and student outcomes (Hart, 1993; Hart & Bredeson, forthcoming; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979; Smith & Peterson, 1988). Examples are drawn from the research on principal instructional leadership, socialization, and effects. A number of themes from the sociology and social psychology literature frame the discussion, among them:

(1) An effective principal can only achieve influence beyond the ordinary, minimum levels enforced by formal authority when his leadership has been endorsed or legitimized by teachers and other members of the school organization. Validation is a social, not an individual, process.

(2) Principals can learn to analyze and shape the social processes that lead to validation by the school as a social unit.

(3) Current practice for educating, appointing, and socializing principals promotes a custodial response from principals, reinforcing conventional behavior that limits the creativity and innovation necessary to improve student and teacher outcomes in a diverse and rapidly changing social context.

(4) Districts can design training and socialization experiences for principals that enable role and content innovation and the development of creative new solutions to school problems.

(5) The need for a principal to respect the existing school culture and work within it and the need for change and innovation will conflict. Principals should be aware of and plan to deal with this conflict. They also should be able to deal with the constant tension between the stability of the social group and their own potential contribution and individual creativity.

(6) A major mechanism through which principals can help shape outcomes is social information processing and sense making -- the development of a "shared reality" within the school social group that affirms the achievement of goals.

(7) Leaders who tend to be most successful in their organizations also tend to experience personal change and growth as they influence outcomes. Development is a two-way, interactive process.

(8) social influence behavior and outcomes can be observed, documented, and used as part of principal accountability and evaluation criteria (Hart, 1991, 1993).

Leader/School Interaction as an Evaluation Framework

Like other professionals, the actions principals take are appropriate or inappropriate in a given context. They cannot be decoupled from the school the principal is assigned to lead. One can ask whether a principal's actions are justified, whether accepted standards of professional behavior would lead another principal to similar conclusions. Principals should to be held to a standard of behavior consonant with those in similar circumstances. Standards tie knowledge and action to context. This absolute reality requires principal evaluation frameworks that acknowledge the importance of actions taken in context under unique circumstances. (Later, I tie this argument to a call for a best professional practice standard.)

Common principal evaluation schemes, on the other hand, often emphasize processes such as student behavior management and control and communication skills. They highlight congruence and conformity -- loyalty to superiors and personal appearance. The most common criteria used to evaluate principals, superior and patron satisfaction, also are the most frequent causes for dismissal! As I briefly discussed in the background section of this paper, the popular professional literature reveals how very suspect such systems are, as authors describe the obfuscation and power of the "fudge factor" (Ginsberg & Berry, 1989).

Another major influence over principal evaluation accompanied the effective schools literature in the late 1970s and the 1980s. Almost as it hit the presses, the effective schools research highlighted the imperative that context must be part of any comprehensive attempt to evaluate the appropriateness and utility of principals' actions. Effective principals were described by scholars of effective schools as strong and directive leaders who set high but attainable standards and then resolutely held teachers and students accountable for reaching them (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan & Lee, 1982; Edmonds, 1982). Immediately, critics noted that the research on which these recommendations were based was conducted in almost exclusively in under performing, urban elementary schools. These schools faced formidable challenges, unquestionably. Yet findings were generalized to other settings with very different problems. At the same time, "effectiveness" criteria proved unstable (Rowan, Bossert & Dwyer, 1983).

Effective Working Relationships

These context problems with principal evaluation models highlight the central functions served by an interaction perspective for principal evaluation focused on the principal and the school. First, a principal's work often is decoupled from the teaching and learning experience. Principals exert little direct control over the teaching and learning process, even as they function as the focal point of organizational processes and governance (Kmetz & Willower, 1982; Martin & Willower, 1981). They lack the absolute power or even direct influence that allows causal linkages (even inferred causal linkages) to be drawn with confidence. Thus,

indirect interaction becomes more important.

Second, others, including teachers, may function as instructional leaders in effective schools (Duke, 1987; Edmonds, 1982; Little, 1982, 1990). To attribute any gains in student achievement to principals would be impossible. This reality directs attention to the professional work group and to the principal's ability to affect their concerted efforts toward improvements in student outcomes. These two features of schools -- that the principal's work is indirectly linked at best to actions immediately leading to student achievement and that others function as instructional leaders in schools -- require that principal evaluation focus on social interaction dynamics.

A focus on effective working relationships relies on the power of the school social system to affect students' work and learning. The interaction between the principal and the school social unit is within the influence of a principal, amenable to study and assessment, and known to affect the actions and outcomes of schools. Superintendents and other supervisors can examine principals' use of organizational analysis techniques that can enhance their success as school leaders and provide opportunities to promote the instructional practices and goals valued by the school district.

This emphasis may be played out in several ways. First, principals can provide evidence that they have examined and understand the unique professional goals and aspirations of a school's faculty. These professional aspirations can be marshalled as resources for facilitating and improving student outcomes.

Second, principals can identify key spokespersons for the faculty, opinion leaders, outliers, and respected opponents to demonstrate their ability to conduct and use organizational analysis to understand the school, its culture, and its most powerful ways to accomplishing goals. They can use this information to plan exchange sessions with other principals, to implement important school level improvement strategies, and to tap the best resources the school has to offer as a composite resource for teachers, students, parents, and communities to achieve their goals (Schein, 1985).

Third, a principal can prepare (in written or oral form) a cultural analysis of the school, a description of shared realities, beliefs, and values along with diversions from this group assessment. This analysis can be used to identify differences, seek organizational ways of doing things that are established and accepted by professionals and community members, and diagnose points of conflict that require attention, amelioration, or negotiation. Principals should be able to tell their superiors what norms, beliefs, assumptions, and ways of knowing and doing shape work and sense making in the school. They can then identify intervention areas with high potential and areas

in which they face major obstacles, opposition, or social system obstructions. As Schein (1985) pointed out, there may be no such thing as a "good" or "bad" organizational culture, but there definitely are better or poorer ways of understanding and using culture to help organizational members achieve goals.

Knowledge and use of teachers' professional values provide a fourth school social system feature on which principals can be evaluated. Principals should know about teachers' professional values. These values underlie teachers' searches for opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and skills and fulfill their professional goals.

A fifth way in which evaluation can be used to enhance and enforce principal effects on the social organization of schools relates to resources. Principals who demonstrate ways in which they have garnered valued resources needed by teachers also demonstrate how they have made a social system more effective, how they have moved toward acceptance, endorsement, and validation, and how they have promoted desired outcomes. Superiors can ask for evidence that principals are working to secure resources (i.e., staff development, information, training, reallocation of funds) that teachers value and use in their instructional work. By evaluating organizational and cultural analyses on the part of principals and the social interactions among principals and others who work in schools, superiors define the processes and outcomes they value and focus principals' attention on the knowledge and skills that promote school achievement.

Organizational Analysis by Principals

The successful nurturing of these effective school relationships requires that principals know their schools and that they be able to analyze and understand complex interactions. Acknowledging this complexity of leadership in organizations, Bennis (1990) said: "Sooner or later, each of us has to accept the fact that complexity is here to stay...." Complexity requires that principals develop the orientation that supports a commitment to recognizing and learning about their school organizations and a quest for the knowledge and skills necessary for insightful and penetrating organizational analysis.

Models for analyzing the culture, values, and needs of organizations exist in many forms. Qualitative research methods grounded in (1) the examination of documents, (2) open-ended and carefully planned interviews, (3) careful, iterative analyses, (4) audits of preliminary conclusions, and (5) checking for representativeness or for outliers and checking with other participants provide a rigorous and uncomplicated model when modified for the realities of principals' experience in school organizational life (Hart, 1986). Schein (1985) offered basic questions and methods useful to analysts interested in understanding organizational culture that can be readily adapted

by administrators (Hart, 1993). He asserted that cultural leadership may be the most important function of administrators, and scholars studying educational administration concur (Miskel & Cosgrove, 1985). Simultaneously, these organizational analyses provide hard data on which principals' work can be assessed and provide a rich foundation for discussion and intervention with the help of other educators in district organizations. Careful education and plans for analysis form the basis for this approach because the process is far from simple. Culture rests in the deep level of:

> basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organization, that operate unconsciously, and that define in a basic "taken-for-granted" fashion an organization's view of itself and its environment. These assumptions and beliefs are learned responses to a group's problems of survival in its external environment and its problems of internal integration. They come to be taken for granted because they solve those problems repeatedly and reliably. This deeper level of assumptions ... culture ... is a learned product of group experience and is, therefore, to be found only where there is a definable group with a significant history [emphasis in the original]. (Schein, 1985, pp. 6-7)

More concrete meanings for culture mentioned by Schein also provide insight into social factors to which principals can attend. First, a principal can describe observed behavioral regularities that people exhibit when they interact. These could include the language used and the rituals surrounding deference and demeanor. Such things as the use of first names among teachers, the use of a title or degree when addressing the principal ("Dr."), or open-door expectations held by teachers for access to a principal. Second, a principal should be aware of norms that evolve in a working group. These norms can be functional or dysfunctional, but ignorance of them can cause major problems for any group member. Teachers who come to work early and leave late might suffer group sanctions for violating a rate or the norm of "a fair day's work for a fair day's pay," for being rate-busters. Third, dominant values related to the work of the school such as "diversity," "individualization," or "high academic standards" shape actions and reactions of teachers and students alike. Fourth, the philosophies that guide policy formation might exercise considerable influence on principal actions. These policy philosophies include such things as "every student matters," "teachers are professionals," or "work to contract." Fifth, principals can analyze and use operative rules of the game. These rules must be learned by every newcomer and by every leader who expects to be accepted and eventually influence behaviors and outcomes in schools. Finally, many find that culture includes a feeling, tone, or climate that the physical surroundings communicate. This feeling shapes how members of the school interact with each other, with students and clients, or with

outsiders.

In addition to these commonly shared meanings, a principal can be held accountable for coming to know and using interaction patterns that are an established part of the school and are passed on to new members as if they are objective reality (Louis, 1980b). These patterns can be dysfunctional or functional and include things like "football players never take exams during fall term" or "teachers use professional leave days for the elk hunt, even though policy explicitly forbids the recreational use of professional leave." Principals must analyze interactions among teachers, administrators, parents, students, and staff in order to understand and use the patterns of culture and, subsequently, shape actions. Schein warns leaders that they cannot expect to change culture: "Do not assume that culture can be manipulated like other matters under the control of managers. Culture controls the manager more than the manager controls culture, through the automatic filters that bias the manager's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings" (Schein, 1985, p. 314).

The manner in which principals interact within complex social systems provides grist for discussion and evaluation. Its use rests in the fundamental acceptance of socialization and leadership as interaction processes involving mutual influence.

If principals' superiors hope to use interaction patterns and hold principals accountable for understanding their school organizations, they must provide a structure and framework for principals to use in constructing their analyses. This same structure then can be used to assess principals' actions. A process recommended by Schein (1985) for researchers seeking to analyze culture can be adapted for use by principals. Hart (1993, pp. 131-132) adapted Schein's researchers' questions for principals who want to do a thorough school analysis:

1. Early in the entry stage a new principal can structure active experiences and systematic observation and then deliberately note surprises.
2. By using systematic observation and checking to calibrate surprising experiences, a new principal can verify that surprising events indeed repeat and are not idiosyncratic. They are part of the school culture.
3. Locate an insider who can (and is willing to) analytically decipher and explain what is going on.
4. Use insiders to reveal surprises and puzzles and to verify hunches. Avoid abstractions and generalizations.
5. Jointly explore possible cultural descriptions with others in the school to find explanations; systematically probe for underlying assumptions and patters.
6. Formalize explanations that make sense and state operational values that can be derived from observable behavior.
7. Systematically check conclusions with existing documents and records, stories, and other artifacts, in

conversations, using systematic observations.

8. Push to the level of assumptions. Try to go beyond the articulated values of group members, and try to understand the deeper layer of assumptions behind them.
9. Perpetually recalibrate and adjust your conclusions about the culture as new data continually surface.
10. Formalize the assessment of culture through a written description.

As a principal accomplishes these tasks and reflects on them, superiors can engage in discussion and observe actions that reflect the analysis. In the process, supervisors create a principal evaluation process grounded in data about the school, its needs, and the deepest aspirations for achievement of its professrionals, patrons, and students.

Another factor within the social context on which principals can focus and against which their actions can be measured relates to the interaction of children with their community -- its expectations and beliefs, knowledge, and culture (Medina, 1990). While some scholars and community activists contend that schools should target their goals for the actual world in which particular kinds of children will work and live, others counter that this demand represents a subtle form of discrimination in the guise of acceptance and cultural diversity. It also unnecessarily empowers those with a limited or narrow concept of children's potential, preventing them from attaining the levels and kinds of education necessary to break down barriers and explore different lives (Cuban, 1990; Hart, 1990, 1991). Communities differ in the values and in the demands they place on children, but the appropriate balance between acceptance and opportunity remains unclear. These values often include a political climate that shapes education and beliefs about what school "leaders" should look like that exclude talented people (Hart, 1993). Principals' evaluators always must vigilantly guard against reverting to compliance and congruity criteria, thus burying the potential creativity and contribution of school leaders from different ethnic or racial groups and women.

Response and Planning

Despite the insight these perspectives offer, developing specific means through which principals and their superiors can assess the relative success of principals' work in context poses a challenge. Research on interaction effects between leaders and organizations suggests a number of promising criteria. First, principals can present evidence of data gathering and planned interventions in the processing of information, interpretation drawing, and sense making related to goal definition and accomplishment. This evidence, presented as interview notes, field notes and written records, or action plans, should rely on analyses of worthy professional, cultural, and community goals combined with the principal's professional knowledge and moral and technical understandings.

Second, principals can demonstrate their observation and analysis of student and school outcomes, evidence that they are collecting feedback and information, seeking alternative explanations for observed outcomes, and staying in touch with the expectations, beliefs, and interpretations of others. Along with this process, principals can analyze their relative "fit" with the expectations and beliefs about school leadership held by the community, their congruence and incongruence in the setting, and interventions these analyses suggest.

This second requirement implies that principals will be resourceful and complex people. How can principals use their best resources, complexity, and knowledge to achieve group commitment to their leadership? I like to use Weick's analogy of the spines of leadership to illustrate this reflective and interactive view of principal leadership. Weick asserted that a common carpenter's tool, the contour gauge, offers an apt image of leader behavior. In order to act appropriately, leaders must reflect or mirror the characteristics (e.g., values, goals, beliefs) and needs of the organization. The more complex the leader, the more responses available to her or him, the more options for action. The contour gauge is made up of spines that, when pushed against a physical object, reflect its shape. The reflection, or rendering, can then be used to recreate the shape in other mediums. A floor tile may thus be cut to fit a door molding; a piece of wall board may encompass á cabinet exactly. This modeling, according to Weick, provides insight into the requirements of leadership. While principals may be evaluated on the basis of outcomes, the power to accomplish goals comes from the group, and so principals who are successful at effectively harnessing the knowledge and power of the other professionals with whom they work are successful leaders. Weick called this "passive leadership."

This view of leadership suggests that principals can be responsive, can tailor their actions to the needs of each school. Leaders' "spines" (Weick, 1978) provide a means toward this end. This responsive view of leadership accommodates talent, knowledge, and experience. In practice, each principal fears the label "not a leader" and the pressure to act an heroic part that may be inappropriate. Images and beliefs denigrating the interactive, responsive nature of leadership plague those seeking to improve their leadership by improving their understanding of and interaction with schools.

The "passive" leader Weick advocated also must know herself. Self-awareness -- about personality, talents and weaknesses, skills and knowledge, social congruities or incongruities that affect others' perceptions in a given context -- plays an important part in this grounding of principal action in context if it is to be used as a criteria for evaluation. It also shapes inquiry into the advantages and challenges of appointing leaders who are members of a minority group or women. Briefly, demonstrated familiarity with their talents can go far in helping

principals address outcome-directed behavior. Principals can: (1) analyze superordinates, existing organizational factors, and the effects of their selection and appointment in a school; (2) tap their individual creativity for ways to affect outcomes; (3) capitalize on the window of opportunity that comes with a change in leadership, their own appointment to a school; (4) systematically analyze their effect on factors that affect school performance -- and how that might best be accomplished; and (5) work to make sense of their actions as leaders that address outcomes rather than compliance.

The Interaction View

If one accepts the implications of research to date, this paper leads to strong support for non- (not un-) heroic evaluations of school leadership grounded in interaction. An interaction view of principals' responsibilities sets up a context-imbedded evaluation that rectifies many of the shortcomings of principal evaluation systems noted in the preceding discussion. It places the onus on districts that fail to provide socialization experiences (tactics) providing first-time and succeeding principals with the tools and orientation that promote knowledge about and ability to influence school interaction processes and outcomes. It consequently addresses results, because traditional searches for principal effects on schools fail to shed much light on <u>how</u> principals affect teacher and student actions and, subsequently, outcomes. Searches focusing on interactions illuminate district effects on principals (tactics to socialize and affect behavior) and an understanding of the interaction process (how and why outcomes, organizational changes, and making sense of information affect school effectiveness). What is the shared reality? How do the professionals and students make sense of their schooling experience?

Interaction as Leadership

The homage leadership receives in our culture and in literature leads many principals to conclude that they stand alone at the epicenter of ideas, plans, actions, and culture that drive schools' performance. Experience and research belie this simple expectation. While principals are an important factor in the school organization, their opportunities to exert influence on schools depend on their ability to understand and use their personal and social power <u>in the particular context in which they work</u>. As their knowledge of the social processes in which they are embroiled increases and their ability to use that knowledge to interpret and shape events grows, principals become more likely to observe and respond to critical factors central to the performance of the schools which they <u>can</u> influence. Consequently, principals and superiors need a heightened awareness of and experience in diagnosing and working with the powerful social forces that shape schools, districts, and communities.

Three principles relate directly to this contextual

imperative. First, principals function as part of a group of expert professionals who influence each other. When the information exchange attends too exclusively to the principal, information, action, and impacts of intervention are unnecessarily limited. Second, the complexities of school/principal interactions do not make them indecipherable. While principals deal with wonderfully complex social situations, they are fundamentally and absolutely human events. Principals who choose to hone their knowledge and skill analyzing and diagnosing the social dynamics of their own and others' roles in schools can develop strategies to deal with these complex social processes (Andrews, 1971). Finally, principals who can define and understand the power of the group can tap that power. In western culture, we retain a bias in favor of "strong" leaders, assertive pioneers who strike out alone and pave the way for more timid followers. We seek new metaphors for leadership that affirm our heroic expectations (Beck & Murphy, in press). Yet, cultural and symbolic views of leadership exist side-by-side with these expectations and researchers find intriguing evidence of their power in many different cultures (Bolman & Deal, in press). The group and the leader remain symbiotic, inextricably intertwined. These findings allay fears that an emphasis on interaction negates leadership (Hart, 1993).

Intervention

Findings reported in the literature on leader succession and assessments of school leadership support a call for principal accountability for interactive leadership. Assessing a principal's action plan involves:

1. Assessing the news (and the no news warnings);
2. Planning for endorsed leadership from professionals, parents, and students;
3. Demonstrating valued knowledge, skills, and characteristics -- getting to know you without showing off;
4. Avoiding the custodial response, simply recreating the past with its interpretations and conventional solutions;
5. Diagnosing and influencing interactions, shaping information and sense making to form commonly held explanations and interpretations for events;
6. Using the window of opportunity to implement change and reform presented by change, including the assignment or reassignment of the principal;
7. Respecting the culture -- balancing the tension between individual creativity and cultural stability;
8. Attending to beliefs and interpretations;
9. Deemphasizing social incongruities and playing to your professional and personal strengths;
10. Avoiding the "in my old school, we" syndrome -- don't compare.

Looking for and Assessing Desired Outcomes

All this work is wasted if outcomes cannot be tied to actions. One way to assess the results of all this careful organizational level work emerges from the organizational socialization literature on management success as general categories of leader action -- (1) custodianship; (2) content innovation; and (3) role innovation (Hart, 1993). When considered in context and weighed against the needs of the school, these categories can be used to evaluate the outcomes of principals' leadership in schools.

A custodial response reflects the conclusion that the inherited past has much to recommend it. A principal may find that the context warrants actions in support of survival and functional achievement (getting by). The principal simply learns the substantive requirements of the job and customary strategies to meet these requirements. Both morally and technically, to use Greenfield's terms (1985), the principal replicates the actions of her predecessors. This is by far the most common outcome when new principals (or other managers, for that matter) succeed to an assignment (Hart, 1993).

A response aimed toward content innovation introduces new knowledge and tactical alternatives for defining and addressing educational problems at a school. While the ends or goals remain unchallenged, the means through which the principal seeks to accomplish them change. Substantive changes in the knowledge base or in strategic practices are made. While traditional norms and goals remain unchallenged, existing strategies or technologies-in-use evolve.

Under some circumstances, educational problems, the environment, or demands for learning placed on students warrant innovative leadership action. In such cases, the desired outcome may be role innovation, the most radical outcome of principal-school interaction. The principal may attack and attempt to change the mission associated with the principal's role. Not only are definitions of educational problems and strategies challenged, but the norms governing conduct, responsibilities, and performance of the principal's role and redefinition of school goals change. While this outcome is rare, it also is the most <u>expected</u> when reforms are initiated.

Studies of leader succession yield evidence that the most common outcome is custodial when a new formal leader takes charge, even when this outcome is dysfunctional. The ubiquitousness of custodial outcomes may affect our choice of outcome variables for principal evaluation. One of the reasons many are reluctant to use outcomes to evaluate principals may be that changes in content and structure are so difficult:

> The tendency for old-system norms to persist so that they may interfere with proper component action in a new system [is so powerful] that students of industrial and

> other production often recommend a thorough change of personnel in a new system rather than a retraining of the old. (Monane, 1967, p. 19)

While principals and schools depend on each other and affect and shape each other, the relative influence exerted by a principal can provide a measure of success. This influence can be a portion of a comprehensive outcome focus in principal evaluation. The reciprocal relationship can be a source of power if a group coalesces around a principal's leadership:

> Shared feelings of loyalty and group norms tend to emerge that make compliance with [the leader's] directives a social obligation that is enforced by the subordinates themselves.... The crucial problem for the formal leader, with undeniable power, is to win the loyalty and legitimating approval of subordinates, particularly since his power may tempt him to dominate them instead of winning their respect and willing compliance. (Blau, 1964, pp. 207 and 210)

Knowledge about these social processes makes it possible to hold principals accountable for establishing effective working relationships, particularly as they take over a new assignment. Gabarro argued that "a new manager's ability to develop effective working relationships discriminates ... strongly between ... failed and successful successions" (Gabarro, 1987, p. 166). Researchers focusing their efforts on understanding the behavior of effective principals also find substantial relationships between school context and principals' behavior (Martinko & Gardner 1984, 1987).

By using context/action fit outcomes rather than preestablished touchstones of behavior as criteria for principal evaluation (as many current systems do -- see Erickson, 1988 and Valentine, 1986), educators acknowledge that schools and their norms and needs exist free of "good" or "bad" labels (Hitt & Ireland, 1987). Deal and Peterson described the experience principals have when they attempt to affect the appropriate use and development of school culture:

> A school's culture has been created well before most principals arrive; it will exist long after most leave. Only a few principals may have the opportunity to start afresh in a brand-new school, but even then the new teachers and students will carry cultural imprints from their previous place -- as will the principal.
>
> Most principals must work with a cultural tapestry that is already woven. They must somehow reinforce thin spots or tears, shape it to cover different or changed surfaces, or even try to reverse the fabric without unraveling the shared meaning. There is a delicate balance between a principal's doing nothing and doing harm. The Chinese call this balance wei-wu, the place between inaction and undue force. (Deal and Peterson, 1990, p. 14)

Outcomes as Measures of Performance

Despite this ambiguity, schools do function. Studies show that interventions shape effects, and that education professionals can take action. School reform studies provide evidence supportive of a renewed attention to outcomes as part of education evaluation. Ebmeier and Hart (1992), for example, looked at the organizational health outcomes of structural changes in teacher work. Career ladders, they found, had a differential impact on teachers' career plans, coordination and communication, and perceptions of improved instruction. Students felt less alienated. The data revealed dynamic relationships that function as intermediate variables improving student performance. Ebmeier and Hart showed that outcomes at an organizational level of intervention can be assessed. They function as a respectable focus of inquiry over time. Studies like this provide support for a continued search for organizational outcomes of principals' actions, because school leaders may be more directly tied to schools' performance than are structural changes in teachers' work and career patterns.

Summary and Conclusions -- a Best Professional Practice Standard

Rather than relying on research about principals, teachers, and students interacting in schools, principal evaluation systems traditionally have drawn their criteria from accreditation organizations. Lists of skill or competence standards are developed, and competence/compliance constitutes performance (Duke & Stiggins, 1985). Following the same principle, criteria focusing on dress and demeanor, completion of discreet tasks, and demonstrated competence in skills deemed important for principals meet excellence criteria for principal evaluation. These standards ignore the "so what" question. So, what happened in the school the principal was assigned to lead? So, how did teachers, students, and the community rally to promote educational achievement for the young people who attend this school? So, what educational goals were achieved that were valued by the community and the professional educators who work in the school? So, what happened?

A number of scholars challenge this placid view of principal evaluation, asking us instead to confront the bare and uncompromising outcomes of our schools. Using data to support principal evaluation based on results appropriate to the school, Duke and Stiggins (1985) argued for the "best professional practice" standard of evaluation, focusing attention on the desired outcomes and actions link, not on behavioral (or social) compliance.

This examination of principal evaluation based on the interaction of principals with the schools to which they are assigned affirms their call for a best professional practice standard. Whatever the motives, morals, or beliefs of educators,

the standard to which they adhere is grounded in outcomes assessed in context. The best current knowledge about teaching and learning and about management and leadership in organizations appropriately applied in each school setting provides the criteria on which such a standard is based. Schon (1983) found this context-imbedded criteria to be a hallmark of professional work. Professionals, be they managers, educators, doctors, ministers, or architects, draw on a complex body of knowledge to assess a unique situation and apply that knowledge to take appropriate action, he argued. The distinguishing feature of this definition of professional work is that action must be warranted by the unique facts of a given situation. It supports a context-grounded, interactive view of principal assessment -- it is the "reasonable man"(American Jurisprudence, 1989) criteria of torte litigation that sustains our society's view of responsible behavior.

The outcomes of principals' actions or interventions may be social (compliance on the part of the adults who work in schools) or related directly to students' present and future achievement on valued learning criteria. Achievement outcomes address with bald vigor and honesty the absolute purpose of schools: that our children and youth acquire social, scientific, and literary knowledge; that their well-being as human beings and as productive members of the social whole increase as their self-awareness and personal power increase. The educative process affirms and promotes their rights as human beings. A social interaction approach to principal evaluation supports a commitment to this educative process.

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